EXPLAINING THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AS (SOCIAL) ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates that social enterprises can exhibit multiple faces to different stakeholders in order to access resources. This organisational impression management helps the social enterprise resist coercive isomorphic pressure to conform to the demands of resource holders. Participant observation enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation, resource acquisition by nascent social enterprises. Key findings are that the social enterprise is seen and presented in different ways by different internal stakeholders; social enterprises can use organisational impression management to demonstrate multiple faces to different resource holders in order to acquire resources; however the resource holders are not passive recipients of managed impressions. Each has a strategic interest in the social enterprise being presented in a particular way and the social enterprise needs to be seen to conform to these impressions. However, social enterprises are able to utilise organisational impression management to help resist these coercive pressures.

Keywords: social enterprise; social entrepreneur; impression management; organisational impression management
Introduction

According to resource dependency theory successful organizations are dependent on their environment for resources, but are able to shape this environment for their own purposes (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). From this perspective social enterprises may be seen as utilising innovative combinations of different resources to create social, political and economic change (Alvord et al., 2004). However, institutional theory predicts that organisations in a given industry will adopt the dominant practices of the field rather than maintaining a distinctive identity (Di Maggio and Anheier, 1990). Over time one would expect social enterprises to become indistinguishable from for profit businesses, or state institutions as they submit to coercive isomorphic pressure from the dominant funder (Sud et al., 2009; Nicholls and Cho, 2006), or to the moral legitimacy of the market (Dart, 2004).

Social enterprises may be able to resist these coercive pressures by accessing funding from a variety of resource holders (Froelich, 1999). However, a paradox of the legitimacy literature is that organisations may face pressure from different constituents to adopt different practices driven by different values (Sonpar et al. forthcoming). Social enterprises would thus be faced with multiple and conflicting demands (Fassin, 2009). The existing research literature is unable to answer the question ‘how can social enterprises accessing start up funding from a variety of resource holders negotiate multiple and conflicting demands?’

Goffman’s impression management studies exploring interactions between individuals (1956; 1959) have been underutilised in organisational studies (Manning, 2008), but offer rich potential in solving this legitimacy paradox (Elsbach and Sutton, 1992). By ensuring ‘audience segregation’ the (organisational) actor is able to present different faces to different (institutional) audiences, knowing they will not comprise the same individuals that he / she presents to in the future (Goffman, 1956). This paper demonstrates that organisational impression management (OIM) enables the social enterprise to be seen as
different entities by each resource holder, and so artificially demonstrate that it is meeting each multiple and conflicting demand. As well as developing theory on social enterprises and resource acquisition, this paper has wider relevance to OIM theory as it enhances understanding of the neglected role of the organisational audience, and the role of consciousness in OIM.

The paper is structured as follows. The key concepts of social enterprise and impression management are outlined in order to explore the potential role of OIM in resource acquisition by social enterprises. The methods section outlines the case study approach and participant observation method used in this research, and introduces the case study organisation used to explore the role of OIM in helping a nascent social enterprise access resources. I then develop seven data driven propositions which together explain how social enterprises might access grant based resources from a variety of resource holders, while partially resisting coercive pressures. Social enterprises contain a diverse range of perspectives within the organisation, and can exhibit contradictory faces to different resource holders in order to acquire resources. However, the resource holders are not passive recipients of this OIM. Each resource holder has a strategic interest in the social enterprise being presented in a certain way, and exerts coercive pressure to conform to different practices. Thus the resource holders co-construct the impressions presented by the social entrepreneur. This does not directly impact on the behaviour of the organisation, merely upon the impressions presented. Hence in the short term nascent social enterprises can utilise OIM to resist coercive isomorphic pressure and to negotiate the multiple and conflicting demands of the different resource holders. The concluding section discusses the wider applicability of this research, and identifies areas for further exploration.
Key Concepts

Social Enterprise

The term ‘social enterprise’ emerged in mainland Europe and in the United States (US) in the early 1990s, although some of the associated organisational forms have been in existence since the industrial revolution (Defourny and Nyssens, 2006). While definitions of social enterprise vary, there is broad agreement they are organisations that utilise market based strategies in order to achieve a social purpose (Kerlin, 2006). This is reflected in the United Kingdom (UK) government definition of social enterprise as ‘…a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are primarily reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profits for shareholders and owners’ (OTS, 2006: 10). Included within this broad definition is a diverse range of organisations including co-operatives, the trading arms of voluntary organisations, social businesses and community owned village shops. A number of commentators make claims about social enterprises based on a limited subset of these organisational forms. Teasdale (2010) identified four broad traditions from which these commentators derive: non-profit; community enterprise; social business; and community business (See Table 1).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

These four traditions can be distinguished by their ideological positioning relative to two primary dimensions: social – economic; and individualistic – collective (Teasdale, 2010). Bringing these two dimensions together gives rise to a grid (See Figure 1) which can be used as a conceptual tool to distinguish between forms of social enterprise (Pharoah et al., 2004), but in this paper is adapted to conceptualise the social enterprise within its institutional environment.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE
Resource Acquisition by Social Enterprises

The different forms of social enterprise rely on different combinations of financial and social resources. Indeed, the innovative use of different kinds of resources, in a world where competition for their use is increasing, is a key component of social entrepreneurship (Alvord et al., 2004; Nicholls, 2006). Whereas existing organisations build up over time intangible resources such as reputation that are key to a competitive advantage (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006), nascent ventures seeking start up capital must rely on other methods to demonstrate organisational legitimacy.

Financial resources available to social enterprises include earned income (trading revenue); grants; venture capital; commercial and non-commercial debt (Haugh, 2005). Grant funding may be particularly important at the start up and nascent phases of the social enterprise (Peattie and Morley, 2008). However a reliance on grant funding may lead to resource dependency, and coercive isomorphism as social enterprises conform to an image desired by the funder (Sud et al., 2009; Nicholls and Cho, 2006). There has been little empirical investigation of the processes involved in obtaining grant funding, or the impact of this funding source upon management and behaviour of the social enterprise (Haugh, 2005; Certo and Miller, 2008; Macmillan, 2007). To some extent, the literature on impression management may provide theoretical insights.

Impression Management (IM)

The sociological concept of IM was developed by Erving Goffman who used the existential metaphor of the theatre to demonstrate how the interaction processes between actor and audience enabled the actor to present a co-constructed impression. As the process of interaction varies over time and across different audiences, the impression presented is adjusted correspondingly (Goffman, 1959). By ensuring ‘audience segregation’ the actor is able to present different faces to different audiences, knowing they will not comprise the
same individuals that he / she presents to in the future (Goffman, 1956). The impressions presented to the audience represent the ‘front stage’ persona of the actor. Behind this is a backstage persona where the actor develops his/her front stage impressions, safe in the knowledge that the audience can not intrude (Goffman, 1959).

Organisational researchers adopted the concept in the 1980s, predominantly as a means of understanding citizen behaviour in the workplace (Bolino, 1999). Bozeman and Kacmar (1997) develop the notion of consciousness, noting that the actor may process a series of events automatically, using ‘scripts’ relied upon previously in similar situations. If the ‘script’ backfires then the actor is likely to revert to an alternative script based on their conscious / unconscious understanding of the audience’s perceptions. Thus actors may adapt or develop scripts over time based upon their perception of how the audience is receiving the script. This perception may derive from verbal or non-verbal cues from the audience. Hence the role of the audience is not necessarily passive (Bozeman and Kacmar, 1997).

Organisational Impression Management (OIM)

OIM has been defined as ‘any action that is intentionally designed and carried out to influence an audience’s perceptions of the organization’ (Bolino et al., 2008: 1095). It is important to note the use of the word ‘intentionally’. OIM is usually seen as rational choice behaviour. Thus conscious and calculated strategies are designed to manage audiences’ impressions in order to maximise utility. One consequence of this is the neglected aspect of the role of the audience within the OIM literature. In a wide ranging literature review, Bolino et al. (2008) identified just three studies that have investigated the role of the audience. The most widely cited study, by Ginzel et al. (1992) identifies OIM as an iterative process of negotiation between the actor (top management) and the organisational audiences(s). The authors reduce this process to a series of steps. Firstly the actor develops a script in response to an event that may damage organisational legitimacy. In turn the audience reacts to this
account. Finally a process of negotiation between actor and audience aims to resolve any conflict (Ginzel et al., 1992).

The Role of Organisational Impression Management in Resource Acquisition by Social Enterprise

The use of OIM by social enterprises is under-researched, although a number of studies examine ‘nonprofits’. In one of the earliest OIM studies, Elsbach and Sutton (1992) examine how illegal actions by new social movement organisations mark the first steps towards acquiring organisational legitimacy. A range of OIM tactics is later used to draw attention away from the illegal actions, or to deny responsibility. Additionally there are studies examining OIM in response to criticism of an organisation’s environmental policy (see for example Bansal and Kistruck, 2006). The focus of these studies would suggest that where an organisation faces multiple social, economic and environmental goals, or relies on a wide range of stakeholders, OIM can be a particularly important tactic. It is widely accepted that social enterprises are hybrid organisations operating between the more clearly defined non-profit, market and state sectors (Peredo and Mclean, 2006; Dart, 2004). This hybrid nature provides opportunities for social enterprises to draw upon the resources of multiple stakeholders to achieve their social, economic and environmental goals (Campi et al., 2006).

Institutional theory suggests that organisations seeking resources can achieve legitimacy by positioning themselves as conforming to wider social beliefs (Zott and Huy, 2007), and more specifically by constructing a narrative (or impression) that meets the ‘expectations, interests, and agendas of potential stakeholders’ (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001: 552). Dart (2004) argues that the construct of social enterprise has achieved moral legitimacy as a consequence of market values permeating into civil society. Hence being perceived as a social enterprise can demonstrate organisational legitimacy and confer preferential treatment from contractors, funders and ethical consumers. However there is considerable ambiguity
around the meaning of, and the social benefits provided by, social enterprise. The lack of objective measures by which to evaluate social return (Nicholls, 2009) may offer opportunities as well as threats. An organisation has greater scope to manage the audiences’ impressions in conditions of ambiguity as stakeholders are unable to place a value on the product offered (Bansal and Kistruck, 2006). Thus a successful entrepreneur is able to utilise OIM to negotiate ambiguity and access start up funding (Zott and Huy, 2007).

OIM is expected to be particularly important in the institutional environment inhabited by social enterprises, where the value of the product offered cannot be defined solely in financial terms (Nicholls, 2009). Uncertainty surrounding the value of a product is likely to be most acute when a social enterprise is first established. OIM may help social enterprises access grant based start up funding, through enabling perceptions that the social goals of the social enterprise are aligned with those of the resource holders. However, it is unclear whether this can be achieved without conforming to coercive isomorphic pressures from resource holders. The study of social enterprises within their institutional environment is likely to prove a fruitful arena for understanding the role of OIM in acquiring resources from multiple stakeholders.

**Methods**

This paper derives from an inductive study exploring the impact of different forms of social enterprise upon deprivation (Teasdale, 2010). A theme deriving from this study was the role of OIM in resource acquisition by a nascent social enterprise disguised as Global Theatre Productions (GTP) (See Table 2). When undertaking the research I had a detailed knowledge of the social enterprise literature but was unaware of the sociological or organisation studies literature pertaining to resource acquisition, institutional or impression management theories. Thus I started from a position closely resembling the “ideal of no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test” (Eisenhardt, 1989:536).
My research aimed to generate understanding of the dilemmas and tensions faced by actors managing embryonic social enterprises. This case is particularly suitable for shedding light upon the challenges faced by nascent social enterprises in acquiring start up resources.

“Single-case research typically exploits opportunities to explore a significant phenomenon under rare or extreme circumstances” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2008: p27). This case offered an opportunity for unusual research access, the opportunity to conduct participant observation from a position approximating as closely as possible to the subjects of my study in their natural backstage environment.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Introducing Global Theatre Productions

There was a strong element of serendipity in gaining access to GTP. I was introduced to the co-ordinator (Ahmed) by a friend, Laura, who had become involved with a group of refugees and asylum seekers wanting to produce a play based upon their collective experiences. Laura persuaded Ahmed to offer me research access. As will become apparent, I later discovered that Ahmed may have had his own motivations for associating GTP with an academic.

When we first met, Ahmed told me he had been employed as a theatre director in a Kurdish city. He explained he had been imprisoned and tortured for criticising the political regime, and his family had paid for him to escape to England. The other key figures within GTP were Jasmine and Laura. Jasmine was a choreographer who had been hired by Ahmed to co-ordinate the dance scenes. Laura was a community development worker. The rest of the group consisted of nine Kurdish refugees, and one English born girl.
The Institutional Environment

Four external resource holders with an important role in the development of GTP were identified. All were umbrella groups funded primarily by the state to offer support and advice to social enterprises and other third sector organisations.

‘Local Arts’ provided GTP with space for rehearsals and limited funding to help with travel expenses for members. ‘Community Group Network’ gave GTP advice on setting up a formal organisation in order to attract future funds, and provided a small amount of start-up funding. ‘Refugee Support Body’ helped Ahmed on a personal level (for example with legal matters relating to his claim for asylum) and also provided small amounts of funding to GTP. Finally, ‘National Arts’ provided GTP with a substantial grant to help them develop as an organisation with the aim of becoming more financially sustainable over time (through ticket sales).

Conceptualizing Global Theatre Productions

When I first interviewed Ahmed, he showed me a constitution which outlined the aims of GTP. This stated that GTP was a non-profit distributing body, organised on a collective basis with each member having a single vote on managerial decisions. GTP initially relied on donations of rehearsal space from Local Arts, and the voluntary input of their members. At first no money was involved. However Ahmed had later accessed start up grants to pay wages to key staff, and reported that over time they aimed to derive income through ticket sales to performances. I thus conceptualised GTP as a community enterprise in the social / collective quadrant of the typology, as represented by Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Data Collection

Over a six month period I followed the organisational development of GTP. I observed ten rehearsals and met separately with Ahmed on a weekly basis. I also attended
meetings between Ahmed and external resource holders. On six occasions I went out with group members as they socialised after rehearsals or productions. My data came from informal interviews with group members; observation of, and participation in, group discussions; and observations of rehearsals and meetings with external stakeholders. The performance of the first play marked a natural end to my involvement with GTP on a formal level. However I continued to follow the progress of GTP for 12 months after the initial fieldwork was completed. During this period I conducted several informal interviews with group members and external resource holders to discuss and refine my findings. Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic I did not record interviews or take notes while in the field. Instead I wrote up my notes each day after leaving the field.

**Approach to Analysis and Reporting**

Borrowing from grounded theory, my approach to analysis involved continually moving backwards and forwards between data and emerging propositions (Bryman, 1989; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Hence data collection and analysis were linked through an iterative process. This enabled the development and testing of hypotheses as they emerged from my data. Interviews with group members gave me a picture of how they perceived GTP (or how they wanted me to see them perceiving the group). I also interviewed external resource holders to gather their perspectives on GTP (or the impressions they wanted to convey) in order to triangulate my key observations. This opened up alternative interpretations to pursue. Once I had refined my analysis following a process of negotiation with group members, I developed assertions about the case. I then turned to the academic literature to build internal validity and generalisability (Eisenhardt, 1989). This final stage led me to move away from social enterprise research literature and towards studies on organizational impression management which I was not familiar with when I began the research.
Observational research generates vast amounts of data which is difficult to analyse systematically, and leads to well documented problems in convincing other researchers of validity (Becker, 1958). One response to this is to present the ‘natural history’ of conclusions (Becker, 1958). Thus my findings section begins with a description of the initial paradox, and presents my reflections at each critical stage of the conceptualisation of the problem. The reader is then able to follow the process of analysis in order to evaluate my conclusions.

Findings

First I identify a paradox in the case of GTP involving contradictions between the face the group presented to the outside world and its internal working practices. Attempting to understand and explain this paradox demonstrated that there were a diverse range of motivations and values within the social enterprise. Ahmed was able to use this multifaceted nature of the group to exhibit different faces to different external stakeholders. This helped GTP access resources, while resisting pressure to conform to the conflicting demands of the different resource holders.

The paradox of external representation and internal behaviour

Over time, I perceived a discrepancy between external representation of the group and internal behaviour of the organisation.

P1. The front facing social enterprise differs from the backstage organisation

As noted earlier, GTP’s constitution suggested a collective entity. At the first rehearsal I attended, my impression of a democratic decision making process was reinforced:

…One of the young Kurds, ALPHA, was singing Kurdish lyrics to an Eminem CD. The other young Kurds were dancing and laughing. Ahmed entered the room and everybody fell silent. He smiled at ALPHA and replaced the Eminem CD with another one. A soothing Arabic music came from the CD player, Ahmed started to sing in Kurdish. The young Kurdish boys joined in and Jasmine started to dance. The transformation in the atmosphere was acute. After five minutes the song faded away and Ahmed turned off the CD player. The group started to act a scene from the play. There was a dispute between Ahmed and one of the young Kurds, BETA, as to how to develop the storyline of the play. At first they argued in English, but switched to Kurdish as the
argument progressed. As the other young Kurds joined in the shouting and appeared to support BETA. Ahmed laughed while switching to English (presumably for my benefit) and made a dramatic show (pretending to bang his head against the floor) of backing down against his better judgment.

Delving below the surface, however, it became apparent that Ahmed made all the decisions on behalf of the group, with little or no consultation involved. For example there were no group meetings, only rehearsals. Decisions as to how to spend the group’s income were made solely by Ahmed.

I thus conceptualised GTP as both a front facing group producing a play, and a backstage organisation developed to attract resources to facilitate this (See Figure 3). Positioning GTP as a fixed point on the typology proved impossible. Whereas the group was organised on a more collective basis with democratic input from members around the development of the play, the organisation operated on more hierarchical lines. Similarly while the group was more socially orientated –aiming to involve the young refugees in theatre production, the organisation aimed to generate sufficient resources to pay wages to Ahmed and Jasmine.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The Multifaceted Social Enterprise

Some social enterprises may have a greater divergence of perspectives within the organisation because of their democratic governance (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004). Moreover motivations for participating in the SE are diverse.

P2. Social enterprises are multifaceted; they are seen, used and portrayed in different ways by different internal stakeholders.

GTP was portrayed differently by three of its internal stakeholders: Ahmed, Laura and Jasmine. When interviewed, Jasmine highlighted her impression of GTP as a business that provided her with employment. She presented herself as involved in a decision-making capacity, hence her impression suggested a collective and economically focused organisation.
Laura conveyed the impression of a collective decision-making process and argued that the group’s primary purpose was social - to benefit the younger refugees and asylum seekers. Ahmed’s perspective was less fixed. He was the only person who made a distinction between the group and the organisation. My observations suggest that he saw the organisation as his own personal creation over which he had sole control. Ahmed reported that he desired a more economic orientation in order to generate sufficient surplus to pay key staff. The boundaries reflected by these three extreme perspectives suggest that most observers would see GTP as occupying a position within these three points at this point in time (See Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE**

The Role of Organisational Impression Management in Resource Acquisition

In order to access resources, social enterprises can be portrayed as a different entity to each resource holder. Their multifaceted nature helps them acquire resources from a complex institutional environment populated by multiple resource holders.

*P3. Social entrepreneurs can exhibit multiple impressions to different external stakeholders in order to acquire resources*

Ahmed portrayed a different impression of himself and GTP dependent on which resource holder he was talking to. For example, in a meeting with Refugee Support Body that I attended, Ahmed wore a suit and portrayed a more professional side to GTP, presenting them as a theatre company able to train young refugees and give them something useful to do. However, when we met with a representative from Local Arts, Ahmed portrayed himself as a naïve refugee playing on the notion of exclusion to attract sympathy and hence resources for GTP:

> Ahmed entered the rehearsal space from an adjoining room. He asked me to accompany me him to a private office with him. I followed him and observed Jane from Local Arts sitting behind a desk. At Jane’s invitation I sat down but Ahmed remained standing. Ahmed started walking quickly around the small office space. He asked me to tell Jane that it was essential that GTP could buy food with some of the money that Local Arts had allocated to the group to pay travel
expenses for members to attend rehearsals. Before I could speak, Jane explained that this was not possible as she needed to provide evidence that GTP had spent the money on travel in order to claim it back from the state agency which had provided the funding. Ahmed began shouting at Jane at first in English. The general message he was conveying was that he and the other refugees could walk to rehearsals (it was around two miles from the area where they lived). However the younger Kurds needed food to sustain themselves through the rehearsals. Ahmed appeared to me to become more agitated and switched to another language (Kurdish I presumed). Jane smiled at him and remained sitting until he finished shouting. To me she appeared remarkably calm. I had never seen Ahmed behave in this way before. Ahmed stopped shouting and walking in circles. He sat down and put his hands over his face. Jane spoke slowly to him (and me). She explained that she was sorry but that she needed bus or train tickets before she could give the group any money. Ahmed left the room. I followed him as he returned to the group of refugees.

Thus the impression of the social enterprise presented by the social entrepreneur adjusted depending upon which resource holder it was being presented to.

_P4. Resource holders co-construct the impressions presented by the social entrepreneur_

In the above example Ahmed had developed a relationship with Jane where he was ‘expected’ to perform the role of temperamental actor. Ahmed accentuated GTP as a group of refugees with no money. Following a period of negotiation, the resource holder accepted this explanation and tacitly provided Ahmed with the money he required for food:

A week later I attended another rehearsal. There was a table of food – bread, hummus and salad, and bottles of coca cola. I didn’t ask Ahmed how the food had been paid for. Laura had already told me that the young Kurds and Ahmed had spent most of the morning collecting used bus and train tickets from a local transport hub.

_The Strategic Interests of the Resource Holders_

Social entrepreneurs can manipulate different audiences in order to lead them to desired conclusions (and achieve legitimacy). However, the different resource holders are not passive recipients of the impressions conveyed to them. Each resource holder has a strategic interest in the social enterprise being presented in a certain way.

_P5. Each resource holder has a strategic interest in the social enterprise being portrayed in a certain way._
Jane from Local Arts explained the benefits of being associated with GTP. As head of refugee involvement Jane wanted to demonstrate to her managers that she had been able to facilitate the development of a local refugee community group. She had a strategic interest in presenting the group as a collective entity needing assistance in becoming more financially sustainable.

A stakeholder from Community Group Network explained that their role was to provide small funds and advice to community groups. Like Local Arts they had a strategic interest in the group being seen as a collective response to social exclusion. They were also particularly keen to boost the diversity of their membership. In particular they had an interest in the group building bridges between refugee groups and host communities.

The representative from Refugee Support Network knew Ahmed personally and was keen to see GTP develop professionally in order that it might provide Ahmed with paid employment. He also had a strategic interest in GTP developing to provide opportunities for other refugees to occupy their time.

Finally the representative of National Arts explained that they had a pot of money ring fenced to help refugee groups develop financially sustainable businesses. She was keen to see GTP develop along this route.

Together these four resource holders formed the different audiences constituting the institutional environment within which GTP was situated. Figure 5 conceptualises the interests of the resource holders. GTP needed to demonstrate that the organisation conformed to the demands of these different resource holders. However it may be that there was a tacit awareness among all parties of the performance being played out. Each resource holder had a strategic interest in being associated with a successful social enterprise, and was prepared to ‘accept’ that “the attributes claimed or imputed” by Ahmed were GTP’s “most essential and characteristic attributes” (Goffman, 1959: 136).
Organisational Impression Management Revisited

The social entrepreneur is not necessarily deceiving the resource holders in utilising OIM. Instead those aspects of the organisation or group it is perceived that the audience would be sympathetic to are accentuated, and those aspects perceived as unfavourable are omitted. The social entrepreneur is able to use the multifaceted nature of social enterprise to portray different faces to different audiences. However while the aim to manage impressions formed by the audience is conscious, any ‘strategies’ employed are unconscious. That is the intuitive ‘tactics’ of OIM vary by audience and context. The social entrepreneur maximises the internal resources available to him in order to acquire external financial resources from different audiences. The processes of OIM can be seen as a series of steps (See Figure 6).

When I discussed my findings with Ahmed, I felt he finally invited me ‘backstage’ as he laughed at my initial naivety.

Of course he represented GTP in different ways to different resource holders Ahmed explained. He was trying to acquire resources on behalf of the group, and would do whatever necessary to achieve this.

I realised that I was just one of a number of internal and external stakeholders with a strategic interest in GTP. I concluded that Ahmed had initially attempted to convey an impression of GTP that he felt would attract my sympathy and support. I structured an interview around the example of his meeting with Jane from Local Arts highlighted earlier, in order that I might understand the processes of OIM. I asked Ahmed whether he employed deliberate strategies.

Ahmed explained that he spoke to different people to find out as much as he could about the resource holders before meeting them. He would attend meetings with a broad idea as to how to represent GTP but would adapt this over the course of the meeting(s) based on his perceptions of what the resource holders expected of him.

Lending support to Bozeman and Kacmar (1997), an iterative process of interaction between audiences and actor led Ahmed to an implicit understanding of the audiences’ expectations.
As outlined by Baron and Markman (2003), Ahmed’s social perception (of what the resource holder wanted) and social adaptation (his ability to adjust to the changing nature of the situation) were key to acquiring resources. Hence the definition of OIM referred to earlier in this paper (Bolino et al., 2008) may require revisiting. When it is important to create a ‘good impression’ people ‘deliberately search for cues regarding others’ impressions of them and attend selectively to information that is relevant to making the right impression’ (Leary and Kowalski, 1990: 36). Hence Ahmed’s impression management can be seen as ‘normal’ or intuitive behaviour akin to that used by all of us when seeking to present the best impression of ourselves to outsiders in similar situations.

The process of OIM also included what Zott and Huy (2007) describe as symbolic action in order to gain resources. That is the use of symbols to convey meanings beyond their intrinsic value. For example, Ahmed had shown me the constitution document and invited me to attend rehearsals in order to demonstrate that GTP was a formal organisation relying on the democratic participation of members. On reflection I felt that Ahmed also used other group members as a form of symbolic action. I recalled that he would take me with him to meet those resource holders to whom he wanted to demonstrate the professional nature of GTP, particularly National Arts. When he attended meetings with Jane at Local Arts he would take one or more of the young Kurds (or invite Jane to rehearsals). When Ahmed visited Community Group Network he took Laura (a community development worker). He often took Jasmine with him when he visited Refugee Support Network, presumably in order to demonstrate the professional nature of GTP and its ability to train and include young refugees.
Conclusion

Re-Conceptualizing Global Theatre Productions

This paper set out to answer the question: how can social enterprises accessing start up funding from a variety of resource holders negotiate multiple and conflicting demands? Figure 7 draws together the findings from my research. The social enterprise is a constantly shifting shape seen and portrayed in different ways by each internal stakeholder. The social enterprise does not act in isolation, it is constrained by the institutional environment populated by external resource holders. Each resource holder has a strategic interest in the social enterprise being portrayed in a certain way. In order to access resources, the social entrepreneur has to demonstrate legitimacy by being seen to align the social enterprise with the strategic interests of the resource holders. Thus the resource holders exert coercive pressure on the social enterprise to conform to certain types of behaviour.

P6. Social entrepreneurs can use OIM to resist coercive isomorphic pressure

The processes of OIM provided Ahmed space to partially resist these isomorphic forces. It is important to stress that the role of the audiences were not passive. Ahmed as actor entered the ‘game’ with existing impressions of the other party (and hence how to perform). An iterative process of interaction between audiences and actor led Ahmed to an implicit understanding of the audiences’ expectations. In turn, Ahmed used his social skills and symbolic management to present impressions of GTP as an organisation able to meet these expectations. Rather than changing the behaviour of the social enterprise, coercive isomorphism changes the impressions conveyed by the social enterprise (at least in the short term). Thus OIM can also be used to create space for resistance (Brown and Coupland, 2005) from the institutional environment to conform to particular modes of operandii.

P7. Social entrepreneurs can use OIM to negotiate multiple and conflicting demands.
GTP was able to manoeuvre within the boundaries implied by the different organisational impressions co-constructed by the social entrepreneur and the resource holders. The multi faceted nature of social enterprises enables the social entrepreneur to present a wide range of organisational impressions. Hence OIM enables social entrepreneurs to negotiate multiple and conflicting demands.

FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

Implications for future research

By drawing upon multiple sources of evidence to disclose bias and taking an iterative approach to analysis, I have improved the comparative reliability of this study. I have demonstrated the validity of the study by presenting data and my analysis at each critical stage of the conceptualisation of the problem. I have developed seven data driven propositions which together explain how nascent social enterprises might resist coercive isomorphism while negotiating the conflicting and multiple demands of the different resource holders. However the degree to which these findings can be generalised is limited due to the reliance on a single case. These propositions should be subjected to further testing. While the challenges and dilemmas faced by GTP in acquiring start up funding may be similar for many social enterprises, there are a number of variables that may be unique to the case. This opens up six areas for future research.

First, Ahmed’s own personal history may have impacted upon his private and public selves. Studies of Iraqi refugees escaping traumatic circumstances (see for example Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg, 1998) would support the view that Ahmed entered into the role of actor as a form of escapism from his past circumstances. Further research should explore the extent to which this case is typical of OIM by social enterprises, paying particular attention to the interplay of gender and ethnicity.
Second, GTP was a nascent social enterprise. It may be that more established social enterprises are less able to present multiple impressions as the social and economic value of their offering is more widely known. However, larger social enterprises may also be multifaceted in that they consist of a range of different sub-projects or activities. It would be interesting to explore the opportunities these might provide for symbolic management and OIM.

Third, high levels of OIM exhibited by GTP are expected to relate to the hybrid nature of social enterprise. It is reasonable to hypothesise that, *ceteris paribus*, the greater the number of external audiences an organisation must satisfy, the greater the potential role of multiple OIM. As an addendum, the more homogenous the expectations of the different audiences are, the stronger the likelihood of being able to convey a single strategic impression. Future research could test this hypothesis.

Fourth, in this study the organisational audiences making up the institutional environment were each more powerful than the social enterprise. It is likely that the relationship between structure and agency is context dependent. Building upon Bansal and Kistruck (2006), it would be useful to test the hypothesis that the more powerful the audience (relative to the actor), the more likely that the actor will attempt to convey the impression of conforming to what the audience expects.

Fifth, Goffman (1959) noted the importance of audience segregation in Impression Management. That is the importance of avoiding the likelihood that the audience should happen upon the ‘real’ backstage persona of the actor. Where audience segregation breaks down ‘embarrassment’ may follow (Goffman, 1956; 1959). In this study the social entrepreneur was able to maintain audience segregation in the short term. However, long term qualitative longitudinal research may shed light on what happens when OIM fails.
Finally, studying the relationship between organisational actor and institutional audience within the context of social enterprise raises wider questions. As Di Maggio and Anheier (1990) noted twenty years ago, the study of nonprofits is in general the domain of academics whose values led them to take an uncritical stance and neglect the institutional environment within which nonprofits were situated. Today the study of social enterprise and entrepreneurship is often equated with individuals and organisations attempting to ‘change the world’ (Bornstein, 2004). This offers fruitful territory for researchers to empirically investigate the relationship between structure and agency. More attention should be given to whether the construct of social enterprise has been produced by actors battling to change the institutional environment, or whether the institutional environment is shaping the construct of social enterprise to suit its own purposes.

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References


### Table 1: Traditions of social enterprise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Characteristics of social enterprises</th>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>Trade Body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit enterprise</td>
<td>Social enterprise as an activity – trading for a social purpose</td>
<td>Voluntary organisation delivering public services</td>
<td>NCVO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community enterprise</td>
<td>Social enterprise as bottom up response to local need</td>
<td>Local Exchange Trading Systems</td>
<td>Community Development Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social business</td>
<td>Organisations trading wholly in the market to achieve social purpose</td>
<td>The Big Issue</td>
<td>Social Enterprise Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community business</td>
<td>Social enterprise as democratic and collectively owned organisations that distribute surpluses to their members or reinvest them in the business</td>
<td>Worker co-operative</td>
<td>Co-operatives UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Type</td>
<td>Case Study Organisation</td>
<td>Social - Economic</td>
<td>Individual - Collective</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community enterprise</td>
<td>Global Theatre Productions</td>
<td>Social – to involve Kurdish refugees in producing a play</td>
<td>Voluntary effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary purpose</td>
<td>Main income source</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Forms of social enterprise: A preliminary typology

- **Social** business
- **Non-profit** enterprise
- **Community** business
- **Community** enterprise

**Primary purpose**

**Economic**

- Decision-making structure

**Individual**

**Social**
Figure 2: My initial conceptualisation of GTP

Primary Purpose

Decision making structure

Economic

Individual

Social

Collective

GTP
Figure 3: Contradictions between the organisational and group faces of GTP
Figure 4: The multifaceted nature of GTP
Figure 5: The institutional environment inhabited by GTP

- National Arts
- Refugee Support Network
- Local Arts
- Community Group Network
Figure 6: The processes of impression management in resource acquisition
Figure 7: GTP within its institutional environment